

Without truth, there is no exit

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"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." - Viktor Frankl

Venezuela is experiencing a collective grief. Beneath the noise of social media and fleeting headlines lies a deep and painful sense of loss: of country, of a shared national project, of the future itself. This is not just about exile or economic collapse. It is about an emotional wound carried by millions who placed their hopes in the democratic process of July 28, 2024—only to see that hope betrayed once again when the regime refused to recognize the electoral results and violated the popular will.

The risk today is not merely political—it is existential. A grieving nation may grasp for the first lifeline thrown its way, even if that lifeline pulls it further into the depths. Just as a wounded person might seek comfort in a toxic relationship or a hollow promise, a broken country can idealize external solutions, messianic leaders, or false reconciliations.

Grief as a political condition

Viktor Frankl, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, developed logotherapy as a response to human suffering. At its core, this school of thought asserts that the primary drive in life is not pleasure or power, but meaning. According to Frankl, those who find purpose can withstand even the harshest environments, including the Nazi concentration camps. This insight applies to nations as well. A country without a collective sense of purpose—without a shared story of the future—becomes fertile ground for cynicism, fanaticism, or surrender.

In Venezuela, the absence of shared meaning has produced opposing reactions. On one side, some cling to external figures like Donald Trump, hoping for a salvational intervention. On the other, former opposition leaders choose to participate in elections without guarantees, as if resigning themselves to the normalization of the unacceptable were the only viable path forward.

The danger of relief without transformation

As in all grieving processes, quick relief is often deceptive. Placing hope in external actors who do not share our priorities is a form of emotional escapism. It is easier to dream of a savior than to confront the harshness of the present. But that illusion comes at a cost: it postpones real healing and delays genuine reconstruction.

The same applies to political “fixers” who choose to participate in rigged elections under the banner of “not losing spaces” or “keeping hope alive”. Without first recognizing the validity of the July 28 vote—confirmed by certified tallies and the sovereign will of the people—any new electoral process becomes a simulation that perpetuates frustration, hopelessness, and collective trauma.

A vision from the wound

The voice of those who have lost faith in the ballot box should not be dismissed as mere pessimism. It reflects a legitimate stage in the nation’s grieving process: the realization that the electoral path, as it currently stands, has been exhausted. One voter, echoing the sentiment of many, put it clearly: “For years I defended the vote, even with doubts. Today, after the denial of July 28, I can no longer legitimize a system that uses our participation to justify itself”.

A country that refuses to acknowledge its loss or to heal its collective wounds is doomed to repeat the cycle of authoritarianism. Recent Latin American history offers multiple warnings: transitions without truth that failed to consolidate real democracies and instead led to new forms of authoritarianism or corrosive political cynicism. This happened in Chile after Pinochet, in Guatemala after the civil war, in post-Fujimori Peru, in Argentina after the dictatorship, and in Colombia after the paramilitary demobilization. In each case, the absence of truth and justice planted the seeds of further fractures.

Venezuela now faces precisely that risk. Without a process that recognizes the July 28 outcome, any future election—no matter how participatory—risks becoming a legitimizing exercise for the status quo. The voices warning against this trap are not expressions of defeatism, but of realism. Without truth, there is no trust. And without trust, democracy is not possible.

This position does not reject democracy—it demands its full restoration. It insists that before contemplating future elections, the sovereign decision already expressed must be acknowledged. In Frankl’s terms, it is about giving meaning to suffering, so it is not endured in vain.

The path to resilience

Healing the collective grief requires three essential tasks:

1. **Name the loss:** Acknowledge that what was lost was more than an election; it was faith in the democratic rules of the game.

2. **Build an empathetic community:** Replace judgment with mutual understanding. Grief takes many forms—some shout, some emigrate, some organize, some withdraw. All are expressions of the same pain.
3. **Transform suffering into purpose:** As logotherapy teaches, the question is not “why” but “what for”. And that purpose cannot be dictated from Washington or Brussels. It must emerge from within—from a recognition of our shared wound and a collective refusal to repeat it.

From pain to meaning

Venezuela does not need anesthesia—it needs meaning. It does not need saviors, but leaders who validate collective suffering and channel it into transformative power. As the Austrian psychiatrist warned, “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves”.

July 28, 2024 was more than an election—it was a declaration of popular dignity. Denying that act is to perpetuate grief. To recognize and defend it is the first step toward healing. Not to return to the past, but to reimagine the future.

The true exit is not external—it lies within us. Only if we walk through this grief together—with truth and purpose—can we rebuild a Venezuela where hope is not a fleeting illusion, but a possible horizon.

That is why the upcoming May 25 election is not a solution, but a sterile distraction. Rather than bringing us closer to the mandate of July 28, it blurs it—and prolongs a collective pain we have yet to heal.